

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE District of Columbia	2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. XX. The Arts and Sciences; Science and <del>In</del> vention
3. NAME(S) OF SITE Old Patent Office	4. APPROX. ACREAGE 4.5 acres
5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet) F, between 7th and 9th Streets, NW., Washington, D. C.	
6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., 20560, Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary	
7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)	

**Significance:** This structure contained the United States Patent Office from 1840 until 1932. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress the power "...to promote the progress of science and useful arts by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive rights to their respective writings and discoveries." President Washington recommended patent legislation, and the first patent act was approved on April 10, 1790. The current patent system originated in 1836, giving individuals 17 years to make, use, and sell inventions of their own. The growth in the number of patents issued by the Office over the years attests to the encouragement this system has given to inventors. When the Patent Office moved to its new building in 1840, it had begun the collection of seeds and scientific information on agriculture which would lead to the formation of the Department of Agriculture during the Civil War. In the structure, rooms of models of patented devices stimulated American inventiveness. Moreover, the library of the Patent Office had the complete reports of both the French and the British patent offices.

**Features and Condition:** The restrained Greek Doric design of the Old Patent Office is the work of William P. Elliot. Robert Mills supervised the execution of Elliot's design, completing the south wing in 1840. Mills also began the east wing, authorized in 1849, but he was replaced in 1851 by Edward Clark. The erection of the west and north wings completed the present structure by 1867. Although Mills had tried to make the original building fireproof, a fire gutted the interior on September 24, 1877. Elaborate plans were made to enlarge the building, but they were never carried out. In 1936, the long flight of stairs on the south side was removed to accommodate the widening of F Street.

Inside the south wing, visitors entered one of several ornate halls displaying patent models. The south hall measured 266 feet long, 63 feet wide, and its high, arched ceiling rested on several rows of columns. Much of this is being restored.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

Federal Writers' Project, Washington: City and Capital, Washington, 1937.

Articles collected by National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

## 9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, IIABs, etc.)

10. PHOTOGRAPHS* ATTACHED: YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	11. CONDITION Fair	12. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.) Future museum and offices	13. DATE OF VISIT July 31, 1964
14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature) <i>Steven H. Lewis</i>	15. TITLE Historian	16. DATE August 4, 1964	

\* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS  
SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
District of Columbia	Old Patent Building .

8. References:

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Baltimore, 1963), 80; Talbot F. Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven, 1926), 134; Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 87; James G. Vanderpool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912," (N.P.S. Ms., 1966), 131 ; Talbot F. Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944), 49-51 ; Hugh W. Jackson, ed., A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C. (New York, Washington, and London, 1965), ; Washington, D.C., A Guide to the Nation's Capitol (American Guide Series) (New York, 1937), James M. Fitch, American Building, The Forces That Shape It (Boston, 1948), 4 ; H. Gallagher, Robert Mills (New York, 1935), 68-69; Carl W. Condit, American Building Art, The Nineteenth Century (New York, 1960), 26 -- ; Roger H. Newton, Town and Davis, Architects (New York, 1942), 170-171.

Richard M. Ketchum, "National Portrait Gallery," (or Old Patent Office,) American Heritage (Vol. XIX, No. 5), August, 1968, 4-17.

9. Reports and Studies:

Historic American Building Survey: None.

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

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STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
District of Columbia	Old Patent Building

9. Major Bibliographical References (cont.)

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Baltimore, 1963), 80; Talbot F. Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven, 1926), 134; Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 87; James G. VanDerpool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912," (N.P.S. Ms., 1966), 131 ; Talbot F. Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944), 49-51 ; Hugh N. Jackson, ed., A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C. (New York, Washington, and London, 1965), ; Washington, D.C., A Guide to the Nation's Capitol (American Guide Series) (New York, 1937), James M. Fitch; American Building, The Forces That Shape It (Boston, 1948), 4 ; H. Gallagher, Robert Mills (New York, 1935), 68-69; Carl W. Condit, American Building Art, the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1960), 26 ; Roger H. Newton, Town and Davis, Architects (New York, 1942), 170-171.

Richard M. Ketchum, "National Portrait Gallery," (or Old Patent Office,) American Heritage (Vol. XIX, No. 5), August 1968, 4-17.

9. Reports and Studies:

Historic American Building Survey: None.

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: District of Columbia	
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

<b>1. NAME</b>	
COMMON: National Portrait Gallery and National Collection of Fine Arts	
AND/OR HISTORIC: Old Patent Office	

<b>2. LOCATION</b>			
STREET AND NUMBER: 7th and 9th Streets between F and G Streets, N.W.			
CITY OR TOWN: Washington			
STATE District of Columbia	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

<b>3. CLASSIFICATION</b>			
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____

<b>4. OWNER OF PROPERTY</b>		
OWNER'S NAME: Smithsonian Institution, United States Government		
STREET AND NUMBER:		
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia	CODE

<b>5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION</b>		
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Recorder of Deeds		
STREET AND NUMBER: 6th and D Streets, N.W.		
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia	CODE

<b>6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS</b>			
TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey			
DATE OF SURVEY: 1955, 1968 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia	CODE	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

# 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Patent Office is a rectangle 402'-8" long and 274'-3" wide, enclosing a large central court. The South facade is constructed of Virginia freestone and sandstone. The East and West wings are constructed of marble from Maryland, and the North wing of granite. A rusticated ground floor serves as a base for the two principal floors, the facades of which are marked by evenly spaced Greek Doric pilasters separated by window bays with no architraves and simple projecting sills. Above the pilasters is a Doric entablature.

The central section of the F Street (South) facade was constructed first and is marked by the monumental octastyle, dipteral, Greek Doric portico with fluted column shafts and two boldly scaled antae where the portico joins the main facade. This facade extends for seven bays on either side of the central portico and is terminated by the five-bay gable ends of the East and West wings constructed later. These wings are advanced one bay forward of the original South facade and give the effect of flanking pavilions. The original flight of steps which led up to the South portico were removed when F Street was widened in 1936 and the entrance was relocated at the basement level underneath the portico.

The North front is similar to the South front except that the central portico is only one row of columns deep, not two. The East and West facades are nearly identical. They have hexastyle Greek Doric porticos flanked on either side by eight bays of alternating pilasters and windows. A lowering of the street on the West side has created an additional basement level which makes that facade four stories instead of three and significantly alters the proportions of that elevation.

In erecting the South and East wings, Robert Mills introduced brick and hydraulic mortar vaulting in the interior construction of the South wing. Similar vaults with iron tie rods were used in the East wing, begun under Mills direction. The West and North gallery floors rest on shallow brick vaults sprung from iron I-beams. All these systems survived the 1877 fire but the iron roof trusses in the West and North wings above the main galleries collapsed, quite as Mills had feared when he rejected iron in the construction of the South section forty years before.

In its original use the basement was for storage, the first floor was offices and the second floor for museum purposes. Over the years much of the impressive vaulted spaces supported by massive Doric columns, unfluted from the echinus to the base in imitation of the Delian Order, were subdivided into more mundane units. However, the recent conversion of the building to museum use throughout has restored many of the interior spaces to their former appearance. Of particular note in the South section of the building is the Mills double, curved staircase, and the restored model hall on the top floor with polychrome cast iron and stucco decoration and the elaborate encaustic tile floor.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 6. SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian | ☐ 16th Century | ☐ 18th Century | ☐ 20th Century  
☐ 15th Century | ☐ 17th Century | ☒ 19th Century

## SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                      |   |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political          | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-      | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | losophy                                     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Science |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture          |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | Architecture                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | itarian                                     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation     |  |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Patent Office, built between 1836 and 1867 in Washington, D.C., is the largest Greek Revival public building undertaken by the United States Government in the 19th century. Born of confused architectural parentage which included William P. Elliot, Ithiel Town, A. J. Davis, Robert Mills, Thomas U. Walter, Edward Clark, and the firm of Cluss and Schulze, this building nevertheless achieved a unity of design and boldly simple monumentality unsurpassed in American civil architecture. The Old Patent Office was made a National Historic Landmark in 1965 under the theme Science, Discovery, and Invention.

History

The origins of the Old Patent Office, constructed in four sections over a 31 year period beginning in 1836, reflects the confused rivalry that so characterized the American architectural profession in the early 19th century, especially in the Capital City.

"The largest and in some ways the finest of the Greek Revival public buildings in the country is the Patent Office," states Talbot Hamlin in The American Spirit in Architecture. The authorship of the Patent Office design has at times been the subject of some controversy since several architects were included in the initial stages of this building's history. The design was primarily the work of William Parker Elliot (1807-1854), a relatively obscure draftsman and surveyor in Washington. Aided by Ithiel Town (1784-1844) the talented former partner of Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). Jane Davies' article in the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of October 1965 devoted to A. J. Davis' own projects for a Patent Office building done in 1832 to 1834 shows that Davis was not only Town's partner for much of this period but also a friend and frequent visitor of the Elliot family. Davis' designs for the building bear many similarities to the Elliot-Town design.

On July 2, 1836, both Houses of Congress concurred in appropriations of \$100,000 toward rebuilding the Treasury, gutted in 1833, and \$108,000 towards erecting the Patent Office. President Jackson approved the plan on July 4th but ignored Congressional letters which informed him that the appropriations were predicated on executive adoption of plans submitted, amongst others by William P. Elliot and Ithiel Town. On July 5th, the President asked Robert Mills (1781-1855) to a meeting unattended by

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bibliography:  
(In addition to Snell bibliography)

Hall, Louise, "The Design of The Old Patent Office," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Volume XV, Number 1, March 1956.

Davies, Jane B., "A. J. Davis' Project for a Patent Office Building, 1832-1834," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Volume XXIV, Number 3, October 1965.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES			
CORNER	LATITUDE				LONGITUDE			
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	
NW	°	'	"		38 °	53 '	52 "	
NE	°	'	"		77 °	01 '	23 "	
SE	°	'	"					
SW	°	'	"					

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

# 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: W. Brown Morton III		
ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey, O.A.H.P., National Park Service	DATE 2/8/71	
STREET AND NUMBER: 801 19th Street, N.W.		
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE District of Columbia	CODE

# 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

# NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE District of Columbia	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

Old Patent Office

8. Significance (1)

Elliot and Town, and the following day issued an executive order concerning the Treasury and the Patent Office which contained the following: "I further appoint Robert Mills to aid in forming the plans, making proper changes therein, from time to time seeing to the erection of said buildings in substantial conformity to the plans hereby adopted, which are in their general outlines to be, as to the Treasury Building that plan annexed by said Mills, and as to the Patent Office that annexed by Mr. Elliot."

Robert Mills as supervising architect made substantial changes to the plan of the Elliot-Town design. He completed the central section of the South facade extending 270 feet along F Street between 1836 and 1840. Elliotts' four-wing design was not advanced further until the East and West wings were commenced in 1849-1850 under Mills. The East wing was finished in 1853 under the supervision of Thomas U. Walter, architect of the Capitol extension. The West wing was continued by him from 1851 to 1854 and completed by Edward Clark, Walter's assistant and successor at the Patent Office. In 1856 Clark commenced the North facade along G Street which was completed in 1867, and which in 1865 was the scene of Lincoln's second inaugural ball.

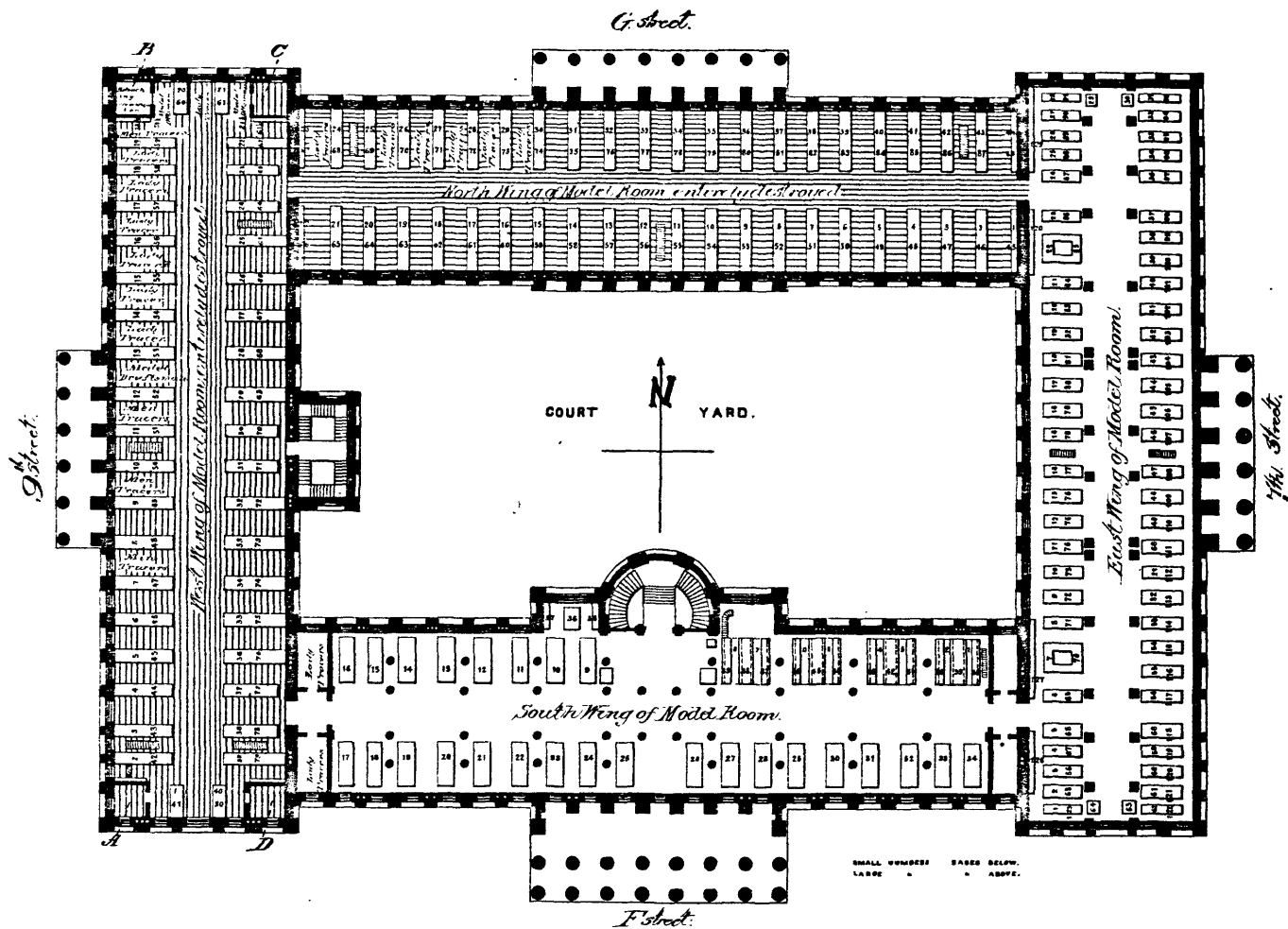
In September 1877 a fire completely devastated the model halls in the North and West wings. The loss of nearly 100,000 accepted Patent models, including the original drawings of Robert Fulton's steamboat, was a great national disaster. The architectural partnership of Cluss and Schulze, who also designed the Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian Institution, were retained to repair the damage. They remained faithful to the original exterior design but remodeled the interior in the "modern renaissance style." The Patent Office remained in the building until 1932 when it was occupied by the Civil Service Commission who remained there over thirty years. In 1952 Congress passed legislation authorizing the transfer of the building from the General Services administration, who had scheduled its demolition to make way for a parking lot, to the Smithsonian Institution for use as public art galleries. The building was extensively renovated by the firm of Faulkner, Fryer, & Faulkner, assisted by Bayer Underwood, to house the National Portrait Gallery and the National Collection of Fine Arts.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)  
Old Patent Office: Plan



*Plan of U.S. Patent Office building--Model Room,*

*Showing location of classes as arranged before the fire and space occupied by Tracers, &c.*

N. Peters Photo-Lithographer, Washington D.C.

Fig. 10. Patent Office Building as executed: plan, museum floor (from U. S., Patent Office, *An Account of the Destruction by Fire*, 1877).

STATE	
District of Columbia	
COUNTY	
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FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE